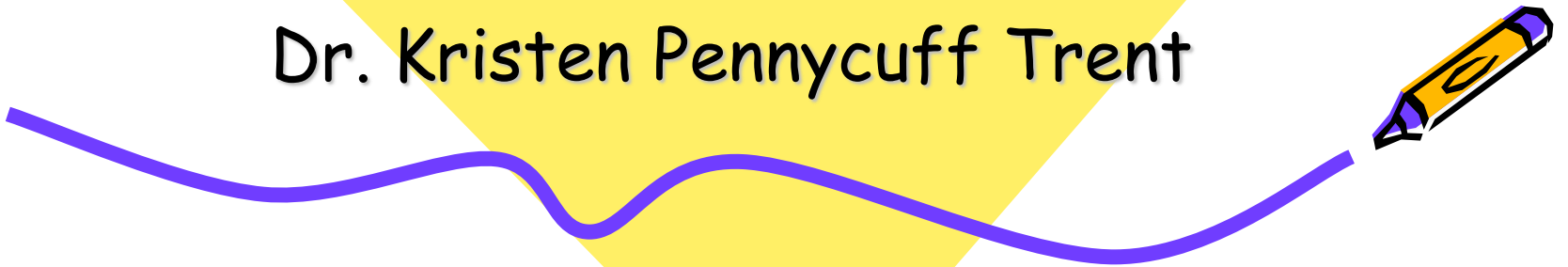




# Cultural Implications for Refugees, Immigrants, and English Learners in the US

Dr. Kristen Pennycuff Trent



# Scenario

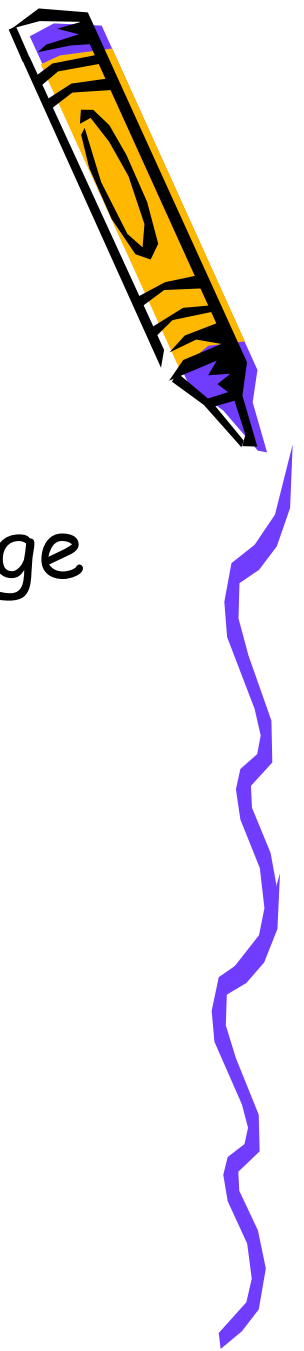


Bisa Haasan and her 5-year-old daughter Anana, Somali refugees from a camp in Ethiopia, were relocated to a fairly small community in Maine. They lived alone and eked out a meager subsistence on welfare, food stamps, and Medicaid health benefits. Bisa and her husband, who she assumes is dead, lost contact with each other after a bombing in their homeland, so she raises Anana by herself in her new host society. She struggles with trying to fit into the American culture while maintaining her native cultural values. They are Muslims in a small city whose residents are primarily white Christians. Her English is limited as well. However, there is an ever-growing support system within the Somali refugee community. Anana is now in kindergarten and plays with American girls and boys, which greatly worries Bisa, who fears that without a proper genital circumcision (clitoral amputation) or infibulation (vaginal sutures that only allow a slit for urine or menstrual flow), her daughter may run wild and become impure before her wedding, especially in the more permissive American culture. Bisa decides to ask her caseworker for a referral to a doctor who accepts Medicaid to perform the circumcision in Maine. Bisa wants to do right by her daughter but has no money to go back to Africa for the highly private ritual to be performed. Caseworker Sherrie Jones, speaking through the interpreter, is not shocked at this request because she has much experience working with this particular ethnic group. She had received ongoing training and support from migrant and refugee program organizations and knows how to proceed. First Sherrie calls on a Muslim leader in the community to explain to Bisa that the Quran does not require this practice; instead, Bisa learns that it is a cultural custom and not a religious mandate. She also is taught about the health issues that could harm her daughter, and that this cultural practice is a criminal act in the United States.



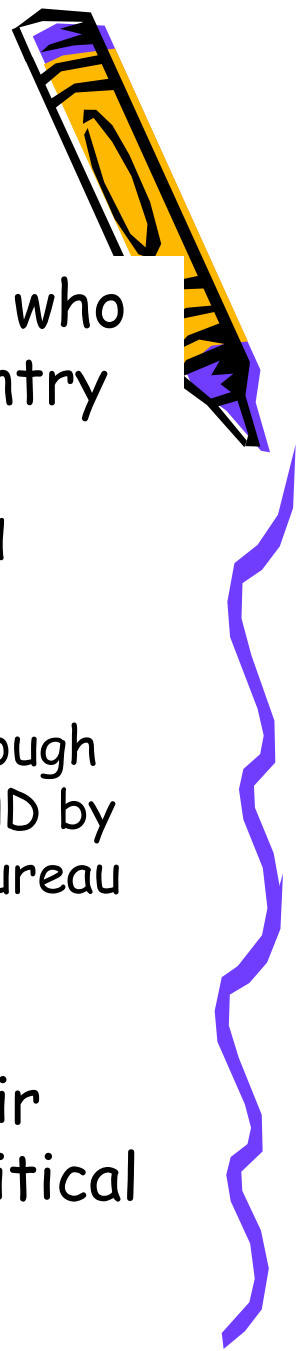
# Immigrants

- One who is born outside of the US and arrives in the country at any age
  - Could be English speaking
    - Canada, Australia, England, etc...
  - Focus on non-English speaking

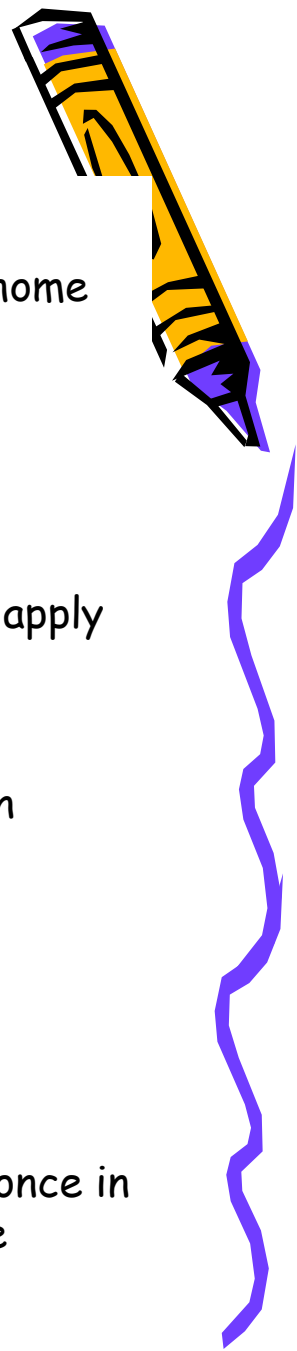


# Refugees

- Someone recognized by international law as one who flees his or her homeland to live in another country freely and safely
  - Receiving country determined by international law and regulations and through cooperating governments and agencies
  - US State Department must grant refugee status through the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration AND by the Department of Homeland Security through the Bureau of Citizenship and Immigrations Services
- Those who must have a well founded fear of persecution in their native countries due to their race, religion, nationality, society groups, or political beliefs
  - (The Office of Refugee Resettlement, 2010)



# Refugees

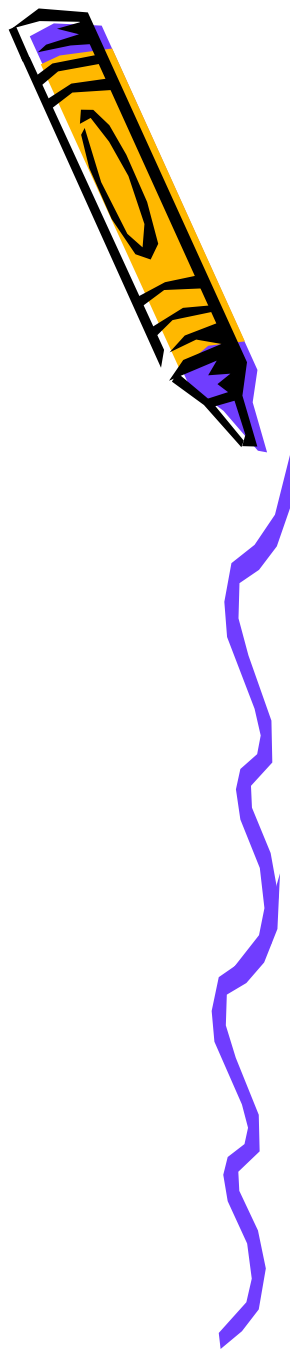


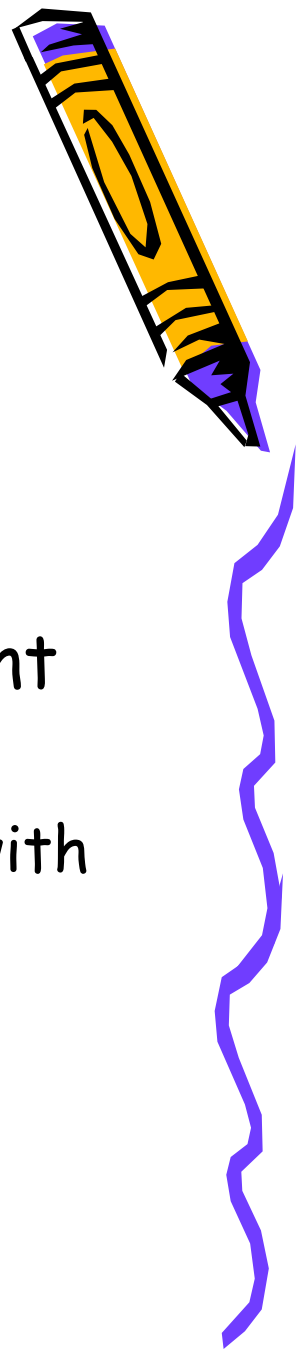
- displaced persons
  - although they may leave their locale or region but remain in the home country
- evacuees
  - who flee manmade or natural disasters
- asylees
  - who flee their countries quickly without asylum status, and later apply for asylum in the host country;
- unaccompanied minors
  - who arrive as refugees without families and need child protection services in the United States;
- persecuted victims of torture
  - in the home country who have had insufficient time to apply for refugee status; and
- victims of human trafficking
  - who go to other countries under the promise of employment but once in the country, their captors keep their passports, which makes the victims unable to prove their native citizenship.



# Refugees

- Somalia,
- Liberia,
- Congo,
- Sierra Leone,
- Sudan,
- Afghanistan,
- Thailand,
- Laos,
- Burma (or Myanmar),
- Haiti,
- Iraq,
- Iran,
- Cuba,
- and Bhutan



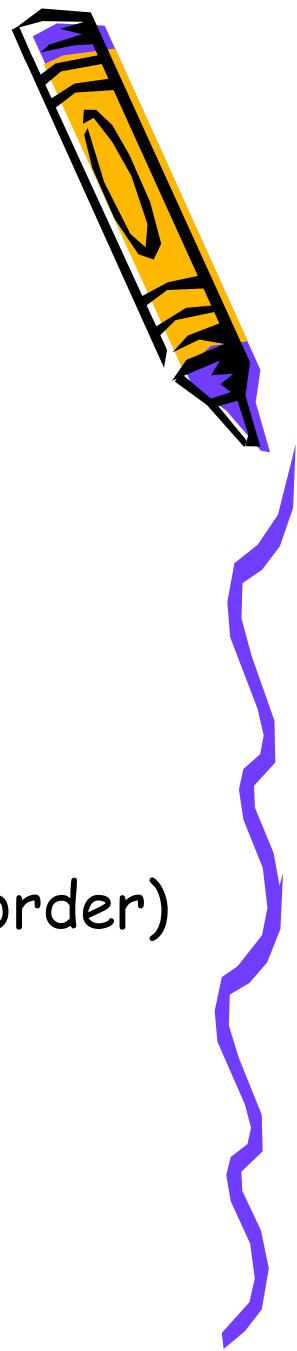


# The Refugee Act of 1980

- Created the Office of Refugee Resettlement
  - Refugee Children School Impact Grant Program
    - financial assistance to school districts with large numbers of refugees and special populations aged 5-18



# Immigrant and Refugee Concerns

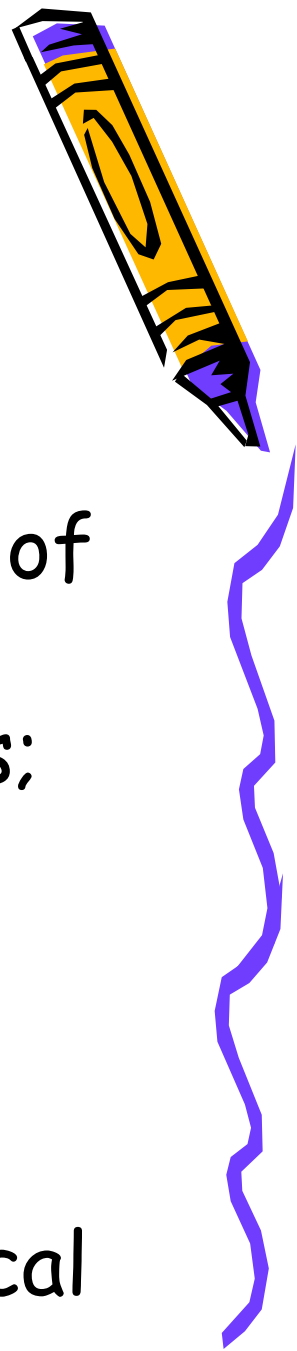


- limited English proficiency
- interrupted formal education
- illiteracy in the native language;
- physical, mental and emotional health issues
- loss
- genital circumcision
- trauma symptoms (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder)
- cultural and resettlement issues
- services
- interventions, and
- immigration procedures





# Life Before



- The constant disruptions; disturbance of daily routines; loss of family, friends, property, and possessions; loss of familiar homes; anxiety and worry over loved ones left behind; and the constant adaptation to new or ambiguous environments can wreak havoc on one's emotional, mental, and physical health.



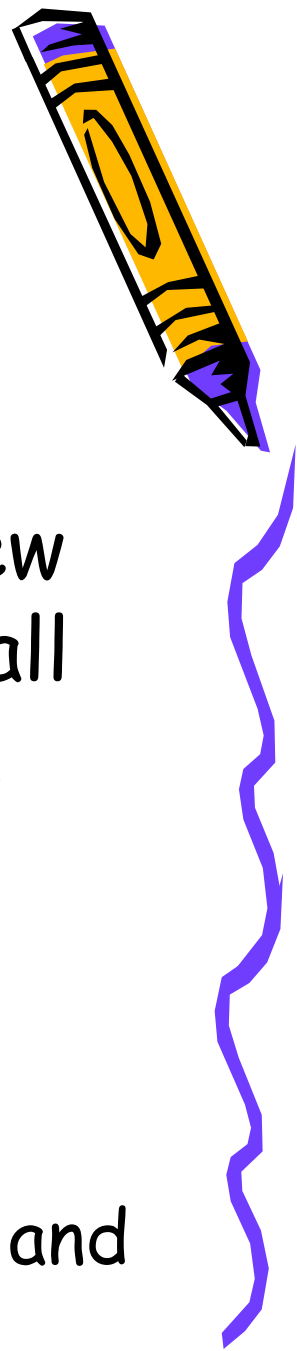
# Life Now



- Lack of knowledge about cultural expectations and behavior can jeopardize successful adjustment to the new culture.
  - Parents are occupied with providing an adequate life for the family while struggling with the language, finding housing and employment, and providing basic needs.
  - The children may go unattended, which puts them at great risk for problems such as gang activity, victimization, and other trouble.



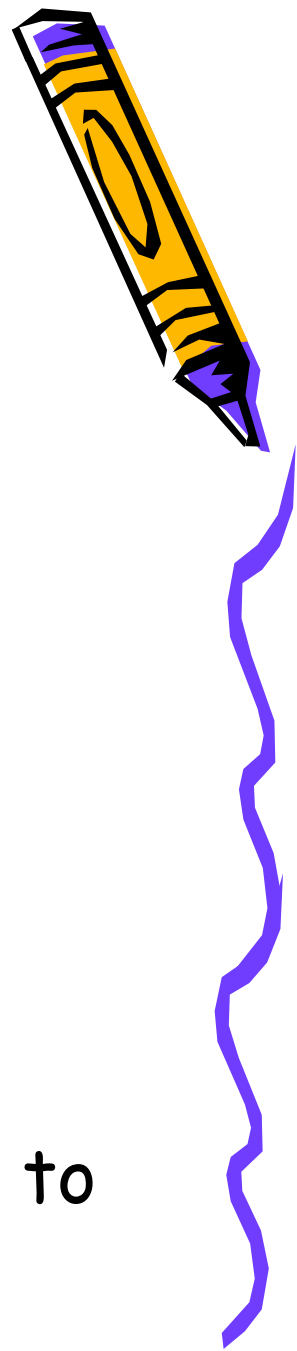
# Life Now



- Regardless of the degree of prior trauma, the abrupt changes and new culture will require adjustment in all areas: psychologically, emotionally, and mentally.
  - The teachers, school administrators, counselors, school/community liaison, and perhaps caseworkers will play a large part in the successful adaption and adjustment of refugee students.



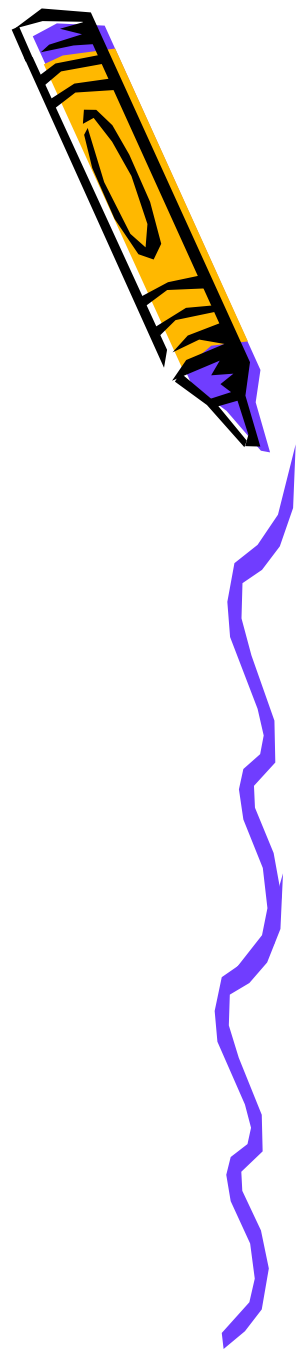
# Teaching Culturally Appropriate Behavior



- Explicitly teach the most simple, rudimentary classroom rules and procedures
  - modeling appropriate behavior,
  - using illustrations that are posted around the room,
  - using visuals, and
  - physically showing the students what to do at the appropriate time



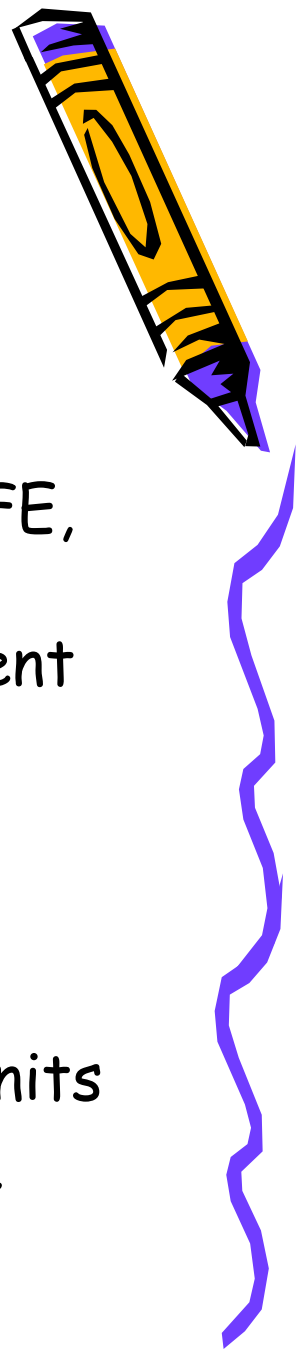
# Program for Students with Interrupted Formal Education (SIFE)



- Newcomer Programs
  - intense acculturation training,
  - intensive English development, vocabulary, and
  - literacy training



# What You Can Do for SIFE



- Offer a buddy system for student to spend time with a mentor
- Invite community members of the same cultural group to interact with the student
- Ensure access to same-language tutors for SIFE
- Create a flexible curriculum for SIFE, modifying both language and content to be taught
- Use collaborative learning
- Teach through multidisciplinary units
- Attend up-to-date teacher training



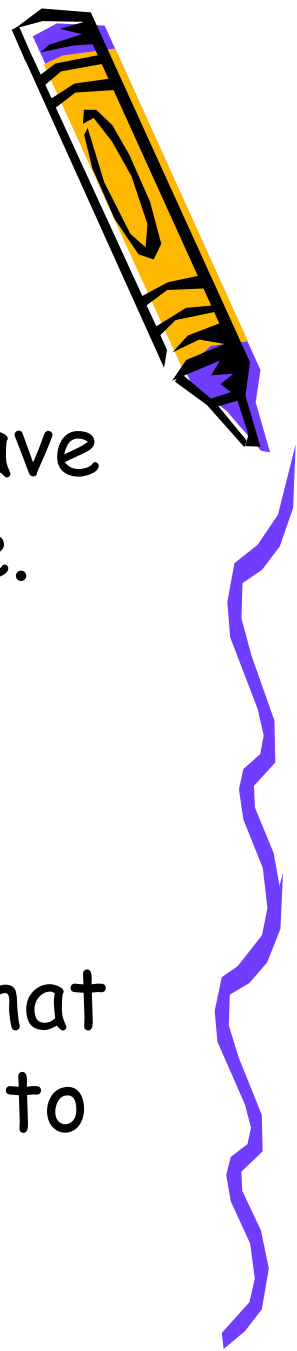
# Points to Remember



- Refugees are a protected population.
- Refugees come with many issues that need to be addressed.
  - limited schooling, inadequate nutrition, and trauma from previous experiences
- Seek services from refugee centers, psychologists, housing specialists, and others.



# Points to Remember



- Students who are refugees may have no or limited classroom experience. Take great care to acclimate your students.
- Health issues may be problematic.
- Be sensitive and aware of issues that refugee students may be hesitant to discuss.

